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SOVIET HOUSING

Housing for the average Soviet citizen is grossly overcrowded and, in the case of State-owned housing, is poorly constructed and maintained. Many urban apartments and individual houses have electricity but plumbing is rare except in newer apartment buildings. Two room urban apartments, originally designed for single families, typically house two or more families totaling 10-14 persons. In apartment buildings fortunate enough to have them, kitchens and bathrooms equipped with plumbing are shared by several families. Only for higher levels of the Soviet bureaucracy do living quarters range from adequate to luxurious by Western standards.

Soviet housing consists of three principal categories: (a) state-owned urban housing made up mainly of apartment buildings and comprising 22 percent (on the basis of square meters) of the stock of housing; (b) private urban housing made up primarily of small houses designed originally as single family residences and comprising 11 percent of the housing stock; and (c) private rural housing made up primarily of small single family cottages and comprising 67 percent of the housing stock.

The average Soviet city dweller has 5 square meters in which to eat, sleep, and spend his leisure hours.* This urban living space area compares with Western levels of 30 square meters per person in the US and 23 in the UK. Soviet urban housing space per capita also compares unfavorably with that in Czechoslovakia (12) and East Germany (8).

* In terms of living space which includes living rooms, bedrooms, and one family kitchen which are used for living, eating, or sleeping. In the USSR, living space amounts to about 65 percent of total space.

In terms of space, Soviet rural housing is much more inadequate, averaging 8 square meters per person. Consisting mainly of tiny cottages on collective farms, rural housing, while offering greater privacy by generally housing single families only, is primitive. Since the Revolution, Soviet economic policy, with its emphasis on industrial developments, failed to increase housing in proportion to the increase in population. Housing problems continued to intensify because of the destruction and deterioration of housing during World War II and, in urban areas, because of the movement of the rural population to the city.

In the early postwar period the regime, recognizing the severity of the housing problem, made some attempts to improve housing conditions. Because of the priority of industry, housing construction plans were generally underfulfilled with the result that new construction prior to 1950 was little more than sufficient to keep up with the growth of the population.

In 1957 the regime in recognition of the detrimental effect of inadequate housing on further industrial growth, launched an expanded housing program which called for "elimination of the housing shortage in the next 10-12 years." By increasing construction goals and by raising the priority of housing for scarce construction materials, the expanded program is expected to increase urban housing space to 7 square meters per capita and rural to 10 square meters per capita by 1965.

While the new housing program is not expected to "eliminate the housing shortage" in the sense of increasing housing space per capita to the level of Western countries, subsequent elaboration of the goal

indication the regime hopes to reduce the ratio of families to houses to one family per dwelling during the 10-12 year period.

To facilitate the expanded program, substantial economies in construction costs are planned through the use of simplified standard designs, and, in larger urban areas, through increased use of prefabricated structural parts, including large precast concrete blocks, and major emphasis on large apartment developments.

Plans call for smaller apartment sizes, limitation of heights of large apartment buildings to 4-5 stories, and lowered ceiling heights. To concentrate on large scale construction projects in large cities while avoiding destruction of existing buildings, heavy emphasis is being placed on the construction of vast suburban apartment buildings complete with shopping facilities, schools, and cultural and recreational facilities.